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UNCLAS CAIRO 004321

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: WELL-KNOWN JOURNALIST LAUNCHES NEW NEWSPAPER IN
HOPES OF CASHING IN ON CANDOR

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: Al Fagr ("The Dawn"), the latest weekly independent newspaper in Egypt, published its first edition on June 4. The newspaper's founder and editor, Adel Hamouda, stated on Egyptian TV that Al Fagr "aims to improve the state of Egyptian journalism," while privately telling a PA FSN that he was taking advantage of the more permissive media environment in Egypt to address controversial issues. Counting on his reputation and government connections, Hamouda hopes to duplicate the financial success he saw at independent weekly Sawt Al Umma ("Voice of the Nation") while working as an editor there. The first edition of Al Fagr touched on several controversial issues, such as religion and corruption. However, to ensure success, Hamouda will likely avoid taboo topics, such as criticizing President Mubarak personally. End summary.

2. (SBU) The first issue of Egyptian weekly Al Fagr ("The Dawn") hit newsstands on June 4. Al Fagr's founder and Editor-in-chief, Adel Hamouda, appeared on Egyptian Channel 2's popular program Al Bayt Al Baytak ("Make Yourself at Home") on June 4 to publicize Al Fagr. "The newspaper aims to improve the state of Egyptian journalism" and "give voice to a new generation of reporters," Hamouda explained. Hamouda told a PA FSN on June 2 that he intends to take advantage of the current environment of increased openness and reform in Egypt to bring controversial subjects into the public debate. He also stated that Al Fagr's "formula" for success would be based on three things: "Sex, sports, and religion." (Note: Hamouda still writes a column for pro-government daily Al Ahram (circulation: 750,000), and established his reputation as an editor with liberal weekly Rose Al Youssef (circulation: 50,000). End note.)

3. (SBU) Hamouda told a PA FSN in May that he was leaving the popular independent weekly Sawt Al Umma (circulation: 50,000) after a falling-out over money. Hamouda reported that Sawt Al Umma's Editor-in-chief and owner, Essam Fahmy, earned eight million Egyptian pounds during the past year, yet did not give Hamouda or his staff a bonus for their work. Hamouda, seeing the profit to be made from Sawt Al Umma's hard-hitting and controversy-courting coverage, decided to start his own newspaper. He received permission from the government earlier this year to do so, noting that his biggest challenge was convincing the GOE that Al Fagr would not be "anti-Mubarak," but "a benign, liberal newspaper which would stand up against corruption and terrorism, and call for a sound, democratic system."

4. (U) Heavy on editorials and commentaries, and light on news reporting, Al Fagr's first edition, at 28 pages, confronts several controversial issues, touching on government corruption and religious themes. For example, a feature on page 4 profiled allegations that top Egyptian government officials are "monopolizing 500,000 jobs" to give to their favorites; while a full-page article on page 8 profiled IMF allegations of financial corruption against the Egyptian government. (Note: Neither article named any names. End note.) A smaller article on page 9 reported on nine Coptic monks in Fayoum who lodged a complaint against Pope Shenouda for unfair treatment within their monastery. The newspaper's banner graphic is that of a young woman cheering in a crowd of people waving Egyptian flags, with the words above her head: "Al Fagr: The Voice of Freedom."

5. (SBU) Comment: Hamouda, having witnessed Sawt Al Umma's financial success, is counting on his reputation as a journalist and his relationship with the Egyptian Government to ensure success. Hamouda will likely model his newspaper after Sawt Al Umma, not shying away from controversial topics and encouraging a lively writing style from his reporters. But Al Fagr will also likely not cross government-established 'red lines' for the media - for example, naming names of corrupt government officials and attacking Mubarak personally. End comment.

GRAY

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